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ABSTRACT

This report presents major drop-out prevention events in the Austin (Texas) Independent School District (AISD) since these efforts were initiated in 1982 by the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE). The following are the major findings of the report: (1) the ORE has been researching and studying the dropout problem since 1982-83, and the effort has grown with district initiative, community cooperation, and Federal funding; (2) the ORE developed a system for tracking dropouts in 1983-84 and has published yearly reports since then; (3) state legislation continues to impact the identification and treatment of at-risk students; (4) the AISD is a leader in dropout prevention efforts in Texas, and Texas state policymakers often uses the AISD as a resource when designing legislation; (5) there has been a recognition that the schools as currently structured are not meeting the needs of all students, and consequently, the Evening High School, the Alternative Learning Center, and the restructuring of Robbins Secondary School were developed; (6) the AISD and individual district schools are open to experimenting with new ideas and concepts in order to reduce the district dropout rate; and (7) the AISD continues to respond to research reporting the needs of students. Included are 13 references. (JB)

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Austin Independent School District

Austin, Texas
August, 1991

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HISTORY OF DROPOUT-PREVENTION EVENTS IN AISD

Executive Summary

Austin Independent School District
Department of Management Information
Office of Research and Evaluation

Authors: Linda Frazer, Todd Nichols, and David Wilkinson

Summary

Since the summer of the 1982-83 school year, reducing the dropout rate has been a priority in AISD. In 1983-84, the District created a task force to study dropout prevention. That same year, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) developed a system to track annual dropout rates, the results of which have been reported each year since.

State reform legislation, which borrowed from ORE research, closely followed AISD procedures and stimulated the districtwide trend of reducing the dropout rate. In 1987-88, AISD began receiving federal funding for a project to enhance the District's work in dropout prevention.

Both the District and the schools have continued aggressively attacking the dropout problem in recent years, trying several innovative approaches to reaching nontraditional students.

A copy of the full report for which this is the Executive Summary is available as Publication Number 90.42 from:
Austin Independent School District
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Major Findings

1. ORE has been researching and studying the dropout problem since1982-83. Since then, the effort has grown as a result of District initiative, community cooperation, and federal funding.

2. ORE developed a system for tracking dropouts in 1983-84 and has published reports with yearly dropout rates since then.

3. State legislation, started as reforms in 1984, continues to impact the identification and treatment of at-risk students.

4. AISD is a leader in dropout prevention efforts in the State of Texas. The State often uses AISD as a resource when designing legislation to combat the dropout problem statewide.

5. There has been a recognition that the schools as currently structured are not meeting the needs of all students. The Evening High School, the Alternative Learning Center, and the restructuring of Robbins were developed as part of an attempt to meet the needs of nontraditional students.

6. AISD and individual District schools are open to experimenting with new ideas and concepts that have been solidly developed in national and local research in order to reduce the District dropout rate.

7. AISD continues to respond to research reporting the needs of students by its development of programs to meet these needs.

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INITIAL DROPOUT RESEARCH

"Mother Got Tired of Taking Care of My Baby"

Early, Groundbreaking Research

In the summer of the 1982-83 school year, AISD's Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) published what is arguably its best known, most requested, and most influential report. "Mother Got Tired of Taking Care of My Baby": A Study of Dropouts from AISD (ORE Publication Number 82.44), by David A. Doss, addressed the then-novel topic of dropouts. Named after a student's response when asked why she left school, the study received considerable attention because it contrasted sharply with AISD's preconceptions of what factors caused students to leave school in a progressive district with a strong instructional program.

ORE Dropout Tracking System

More than attention, the report fostered action. The following year the superintendent instructed ORE to develop a system to track the annual dropout rates for the District and for each high school campus. The results of this system have been made public each year since 1983-84. At the same time, AISD created a task force to study dropout prevention. The work of the task force resulted in a number of districtwide changes, among them:

Dropout Task Force Recommendations

1. The AISD Board of Trustees selected dropout prevention as one of three priority areas to be addressed by the system's accreditation plan and adopted one of the first school board policies on dropout prevention in the State of Texas—later mandated statewide by educational reform.

2. The Board hired a full-time districtwide dropout prevention coordinator and appointed at-risk coordinators at each campus.

3. A broad-based Dropout Prevention Coordinating Council, chaired by the dropout prevention coordinator, was created to coordinate the efforts of school district, government, and community-based employees.

4. Many District programs and activities which were already contributing to dropout prevention were identified. These were organized into a total District dropout prevention effort called WINGS (With Intervention the Number of Graduates Soars). Altogether, 50 programs with a potential impact on dropout prevention or recovery were included under the WINGS' umbrella.

5. The Evening High School was reinstituted to assist out-of-school youth and those in-school youth who needed to earn additional credits to stay up with classmates.

6. Each school was required to prepare and implement a dropout prevention plan. The plan and the success of its implementation were incorporated into the evaluation of the principals by their supervisors.

7. An alternative school to serve students in lieu of suspension was created.

ORE Contributions

ORE's involvement in these and other early dropout-related developments is described in ORE Contributions to Dropout Prevention in AISD (ORE Publication Letter 88.L). Among ORE's contributions are:

* Early, groundbreaking research ("Mother Got Tired of Taking Care of My Baby"),
* Consultation to the Dropout Task Force,
* Creation of a longitudinal dropout data base,
* Annual reporting of dropout rates,
* Helping to establish the statewide definition of a dropout,
* Helping to obtain federal and state grant funds for dropout research,
* Refining the state at-risk criteria, and
* Helping to implement a change in the documentation of student transfers out of the District.

STATE LEGISLATION

Impact of State Reform Legislation

Legislatively mandated education reform followed on the heels of AISD's self-improvement efforts. Two bills enacted in 1984 directly impacted education practices statewide. House Bill 246 increased the number of courses required for graduation and intensified the statewide standardization of course content process. House Bill 72, more sweeping in its impact, established a minimum competency testing program with an exit-level test for graduation, limited the number of permissible absences for receiving course credit, and included a " no pass/no play" provision which prevented students with a failing grade from participating in extracurricular activities. (For an examination of the impact of no pass/no play in AISD, see No Pass-No Play: Impact on Failures, Dropouts, and Course Enrollments, ORE Publication Number 87.58. The effect of the limitation on the number of student absences is explored in Why Has the Five-Absence Rule Failed? (2,713,598 Excuses), ORE Publication Number 88.45.)

No Pass/No Play and Absence Limitations

The Legislature followed up on these bills in 1986 with House Bill 1010. Formulated in response to a growing concern both in Texas and nationally about the impact of reform legislation on dropping out, this far-reaching bill incorporated many of the elements already in place in AISD. Some of the requirements of H.B. 1010 included:

* Reporting dropout rates by school according to a common statewide definition,
* Identification of at-risk students according to state-defined criteria,
* Creation of a District dropout prevention plan, and
* The identification of one or more at-risk coordintors.

State Definition of Dropout Rate and At -Risk Students

H.B. 1010 required only minimal changes in AISD. The District's definition of a dropout was essentially the same as that adopted by the State, and at-risk coordinators were already in place. The major change involved the application of state criteria to the identification of at-risk students. AISD already provided information to schools to assist them in identifying students in need of attention, but H.B. 1010 mandated that districts notify students' parents of an assessment of the students' needs and the programs/services being provided to address those needs. 1990-91 At-Risk Report (ORE Publication No. 90.41) discusses the State at-risk criteria further.

A timeline from 1978 through 1991 of major local, state, and national events related to dropout prevention is displayed on the attachment appended to this report.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH

School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program: Project GRAD

Project GRAD

AISD's continuing concern with dropout prevention led in 1987-88 to the submission of an application for federal funds to create a new project. The objectives of the proposed project were:

1. To provide the campuses with an increased capacity to keep students in school by piloting the use of dropout intervention specialists.

2. To examine and improve the procedures for identifying at-risk students and using the available information to make appropriate intervention decisions with the students.

3. To enhance both the understanding of the effectiveness of several of the District's ongoing programs and the capacity to conduct evaluations of similar programs in the future.

4. To enhance the community's understanding of the scope and impact of the dropout problem and to enlist the support of other institutions in addressing the problem.

The proposed project received funding and initiated operations in the 1988-89 school year as Project GRAD, Grant Research About Dropouts. Besides exemplifying the objective that AISD students graduate from high school, the name of the project signifies a commitment in ORE to continue and enhance its research about dropouts. The report following the first year of the new project, New Initiatives in Dropout Prevention: Project GRAD Final Report 1988-89 (ORE Publication No. 88.36), helped to focus attention districtwide, among both administrators and practitioners, on the characteristics of the growing dropout problem in AISD, and stimulated debate about potential solutions.

In the summer of 1990, the District submitted a continuation application for 1990-91 and was awarded federal funds to continue Project GRAD for a third year. In 1991, AISD submitted a new application for Federal School Dropout Demonstration funding, which at the time of this writing is still awaiting approval. The Dropout Intervention Specialists (formerly WINGS specialists), funded by the original grant, are not included under this grant. The new grant would be for a three-year period, and would provide funds for the first year for implementing and evaluating the restructuring of Robbins as a pilot for restructuring other secondary schools in the second and third years.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Recent State Legislation

Driver's License Law

During 1989, several changes in laws affecting at-risk students were enacted by the legislature. In an attempt to lower the State dropout rate, House Bill 850 became effective in the fall. Known as the "Driver's License Law," this legislation required that to get or renew a driver's license, a person under 18 must: 1) be a high school graduate or have a GED, OR 2) be currently enrolled AND have attended at least 80 days in the prior semester, OR 3) be enrolled for 45 days in a GED program.

5% Dropout Target

Senate Bill 152 set a target of no more than 5 percent for the statewide longitudinal dropout rate to be achieved by 1997-98. Districts exceeding the State goal are required to allocate a percentage of the District's compensatory education allotment to remedial and support programs for at-risk students.

Mandatory School Attendance Age Changes

Parenting Programs

GED Pilot

Senate Bill 417, an omnibus bill that revamped several areas of education, also passed in 1989. This bill raised the mandatory school attendance age from 16 to 17 and lowered the age to begin school from seven to six. SB 417 also provided for the establishment of parenting programs for pregnant students in certain districts and set the minimum age for GED testing at 17 years. (For more information on parenting programs in AISD, see Pregnancy, Education, and Parenting Evaluation Report 1990-91 (Publication No. 90.30)). Finally, the bill formed a new pilot program to prepare at-risk students to take the GED.

Pre-K to 6 At-Risk Legislation

In a continuing effort to identify and target at-risk students, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1668, which became effective in the fall of 1990. This legislation increased the mandated criteria for identifying at-risk elementary students and broadened the reach of this and previous legislation to include the identification of prekindergarten and kindergarten at-risk elementary students as well as students in grades one through six. For additional information on the impact of this bill on AISD, see 1990-91 At-Risk Report (ORE Publication No. 90.14).

Recent and Current Developments in AISD

During the past several years the District and the schools have been aggressively confronting the dropout problem in AISD. At the school level, dropout prevention programs have proliferated and have, in many instances, become highly specialized, so that new populations of students are receiving attention to decrease the likelihood of their dropping out. Districtwide, several research-founded innovative concepts in dropout prevention have been applied to help meet the needs of a wider, more diverse, body of students. For more information on District programs, see Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Programs (ORE Publication No. 90.44)

Project A+

AISD and International Business Machines (IBM) jointly established an initiative, Project A+, in the spring of 1989 for the purpose of motivating community resources to improve education and to assure a quality educational environment for each student in AISD. Seven momentum teams composed of AISD, IBM, and community members began work immediately in the spring of 1989. One of the teams, the dropout momentum team, studied the dropout situation in AISD, and together with the technology momentum team, proposed a demonstration project to use technology to enhance the education of students in four elementary schools. One of the main goals of the Project A+ Technology Schools is to demonstrate the effectiveness of technology in accelerating the learning of low-achieving, at-risk students, thereby reducing the incidence of dropping out. See Project A+ Elementary Technology Demonstration Schools 1990-91: The First Year (ORE Publication No. 90.32) for more information about this project.

MegaSkills

With financial help from the Southwest Area Council of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, Project A+ brought MegaSkills author Dorothy Rich to Austin to train 50 parents, teachers, and staff from AISD. Each trainee agreed to train at least 80 other parents in how to instill responsibility, teamwork, confidence, and other "megaskills" in their children. For more information, see Key Issues in Education: Drug-Free Schools (ORE Publication No. 90.32).

Academic Teaming

Academic Teaming, which involves assigning a team of two to six teachers to a community of 120-150 students, has been in place in grade six for a couple of years. In 1990-91, the teaming approach was implemented in grades 7 and 8 in all but two middle schools and those schools will begin teaming next year.

Each team of teachers is responsible for the entire instructional program for their community of students. Each teacher is assigned a group of students within that community and is the contact person for that group. Teacher teams share a common planning period during which they discuss particular problems that students may have and plan interdisciplinary approaches to instruction.

As members of a community, students get to know each other and their teachers better and are not as likely to become alienated. Teachers with fewer assigned students can get to know each student and each student's family, becoming familiar with any special problems or abilities of the student. Parents can have group conferences with all teachers at one time or can talk to one "contact teacher" who is up to date on all aspects of their child's academic life.

Block Program

A new block program was experimented with at one high school in 1989-90 and implemented this year for at-risk ninth graders at six high schools. In the program, teams of teachers work with the students in ways similar to the middle school Academic Teaming program.

Restructuring Robbins

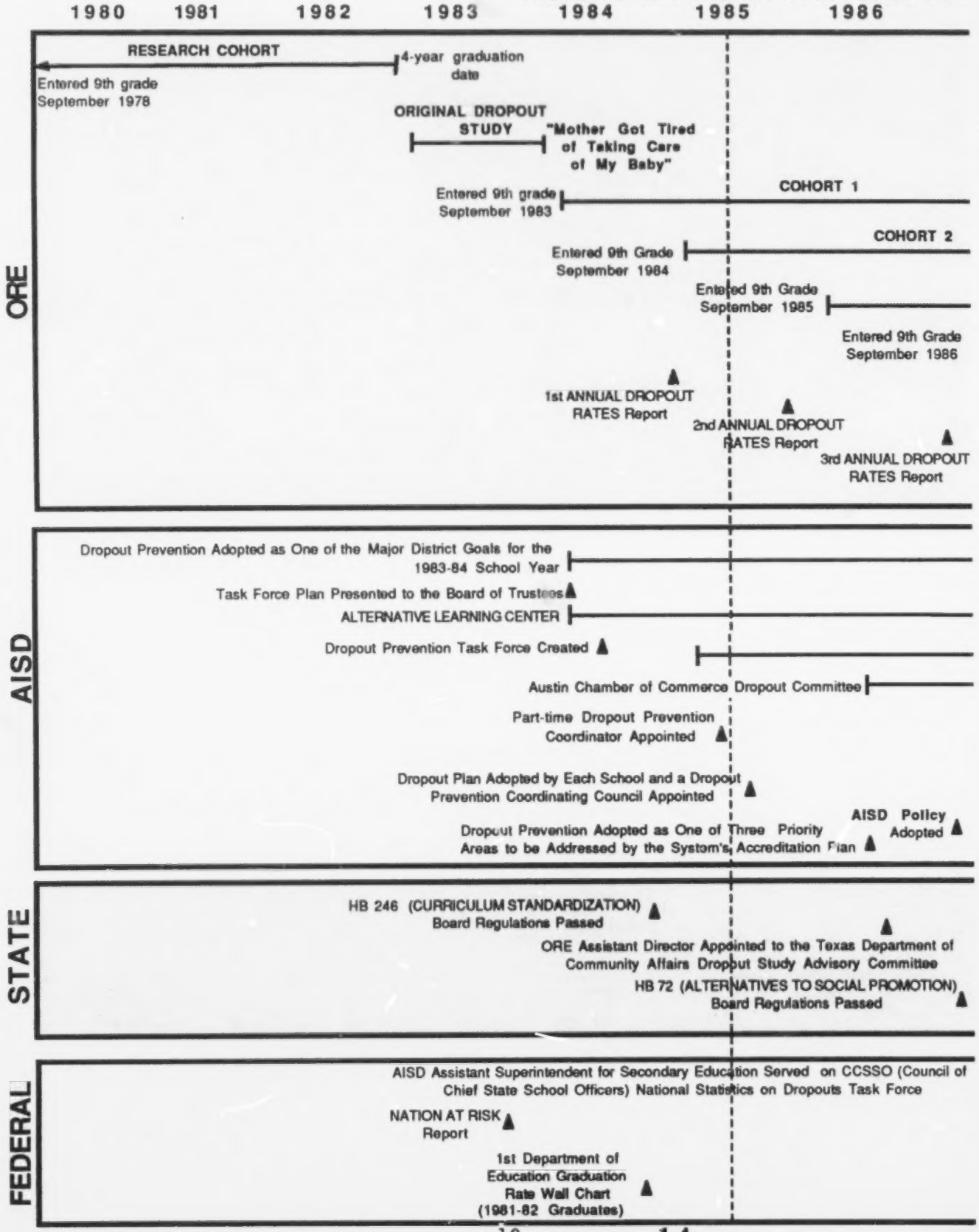
The fall of 1991 will see the opening of a restructured Robbins Secondary School. The restructuring will combine the former Robbins program, the teenage parent program, and the Evening High School under one roof. Although many of the details are still being worked out, it is anticipated that the restructuring will encompass changes in the length of day, length of available school hours, hours required to be in school, course requirements, and grading regulations.

Further Review and Analysis

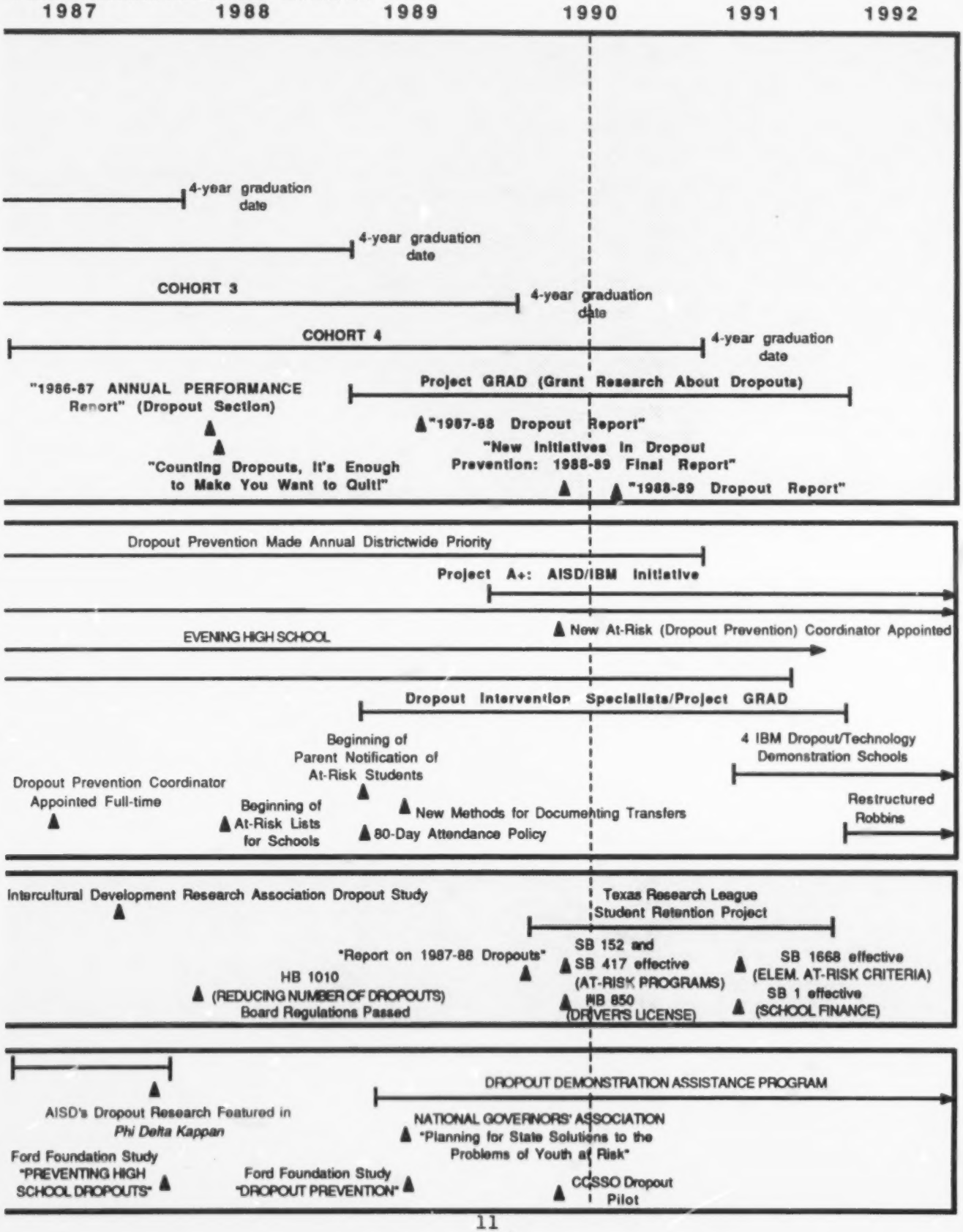
Now, seven years after the publication of "Mother Got Tired of Taking Care of My Baby," after years of local effort and statewide attention, and after three years of new initiatives in dropout prevention, what can we say about the dropout situation in AISD? For further review and analyses, see the following reports:

1990-91 At-Risk Report (ORE Publication No. 90.41)
Findings About Dropouts (ORE Publication No. 90.43)
Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Programs
(ORE Publication No. 90.44)
Dropout Intervention Specialists
(ORE Publication No. 90.45)

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: DROPOUT


1980
1981
1982
1983
1984
1985
1986
ORE
RESEARCH COHORT
Entered 9th grade September 1978
4-year graduation date
ORIGINAL DROPOUT STUDY
"Mother Got Tired of Taking Care of My Baby"
COHORT 1
Entered 9th grade September 1983
COHORT 2
Entered 9th Grade September 1984
Entered 9th Grade September 1985
Entered 9th Grade September 1986
1st ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES Report
2nd ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES Report
3rd ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES Report
AISD
Dropout Prevention Adopted as One of the Major District Goals for the 1983-84 School Year
Task Force Plan Presented to the Board of Trustees
ALTERNATIVE LEARNING CENTER
Dropout Prevention Task Force Created
Austin Chamber of Commerce Dropout Committee
Part-time Dropout Prevention Coordinator Appointed
Dropout Plan Adopted by Each School and a Dropout Prevention Coordinating Council Appointed
Dropout Prevention Adopted as One of Three Priority Areas to be Addressed by the System's Accreditation Plan
AISD Policy Adopted
STATE
HB 246 (CURRICULUM STANDARDIZATION) Board Regulations Passed
ORE Assistant Director Appointed to the Texas Department of Community Affairs Dropout Study Advisory Committee
HB 72 (ALTERNATIVES TO SOCIAL PROMOTION) Board Regulations Passed
FEDERAL
AISD Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education Served on CCSSO (Council of Chief State School Officers) National Statistics on Dropouts Task Force
NATION AT RISK Report
1st Department of Education Graduation Rate Wall Chart (1981-82 Graduates)

PREVENTION-RELATED EVENTS


1987
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
4-year graduation date
4-year graduation date
COHORT 3
4-year graduation date
COHORT 4
4-year graduation date
"1986-87 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE Report" (Dropout Section)
Project GRAD (Grant Research About Dropouts)
"1987-88 Dropout Report"
"Counting Dropouts, It's Enough to Make You Want to Quit!"
"New Initiatives in Dropout Prevention: 1988-89 Final Report"
"1988-89 Dropout Report"
Dropout Prevention Made Annual Districtwide Priority
Project A+: AISD/IBM Initiative
New At-Risk (Dropout Prevention) Coordinator Appointed
EVENING HIGH SCHOOL
Dropout Intervention Specialists/Project GRAD
Beginning of Parent Notification of At-Risk Students
4 IBM Dropout/Technology Demonstration Schools
Dropout Prevention Coordinator Appointed Full-time
Beginning of At-Risk Lists for Schools
New Methods for Documenting Transfers
80-Day Attendance Policy
Restructured Robbins
Intercultural Development Research Association Dropout Study
Texas Research League Student Retention Project
"Report on 1987-88 Dropouts"
SB 152 and SB 417 effective (AT-RISK PROGRAMS)
SB 1668 effective (ELEM. AT-RISK CRITERIA)
HB 1010 (REDUCING NUMBER OF DROPOUTS) Board Regulations Passed
HB 850 (DRIVER'S LICENSE)
SB 1 effective (SCHOOL FINANCE)
DROPOUT DEMONSTRATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
AISD's Dropout Research Featured in Phi Delta Kappan
NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION "Planning for State Solutions to the Problems of Youth at Risk"
Ford Foundation Study "PREVENTING HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS"
Ford Foundation Study "DROPOUT PREVENTION"
CCSSO Dropout Pilot

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